

# SAM PAVITT, HERO.

BY ALMA AND PAUL ELLERBE

A Medal, a Mortgage and a Jamboree.

SAM PAVITT stood at the bureau and brushed his stiff black hair awkwardly with his left hand. The right sleeve of his freshly laundered white shirt hung empty from the shoulder. His carefully pressed blue serge trousers were scuffed high with pale blue suspenders. The sides of his unbuttoned vest hung loose. The pencil in one of its pockets was held in place by an ornate clip. There was a band of blue embroidered elastic about his arm, to hold up his sleeve.

He was as compactly and powerfully built as a Russian wolfhound; thin-fanked, deep-chested, wide of shoulder, long of limb. His face was lean and rather weak.

The bedroom of the little frame ranch house was full of the blended odors of talcum powder and bay rum, burning alfalfa, sage brush and that unnamed, heart-lifting something that is the breath of the summer prairie. For Sam was getting ready to go on a journey, and the window was open to the blue Colorado day that sparkled outside like a jewel.

As he brushed his hair his eyes met his wife's in the mirror.

Ella Pavitt sat by the window near the foot of the bed with Sam's open valise on it; a keen, clean-muscled, vigorous, brown-skinned girl, in a gray sweater, short-skirted, man's felt hat, and rubber irrigating boots with fresh mud stains on them. The early morning sunshine edged the bold, strong curves of her figure with a blurred line of gold.

"This here business of Sam Pavitt said, 'gets my goat.' Makes me feel like a darned fool!"

But Ella knew it didn't. "You're the only sure-thing hero I ever saw."

"Forget it! That's what I'm going to do just as soon as they'll let me go to Denver to get the medal, and the railroad gimme the dough, and then I'm going to stick the medal in my pocket and the five thousand bucks in the bank, and come home and forget it!"

And he would, too. She knew that. He forgot everything. He loved admiration; worked for it; lived on it; and to have it when he hadn't attracted it unwittingly by some deed he'd done, he'd fall into funny strutting little ways to get it, as naive and innocent as Samuella's. But after he'd done something heroic he'd forget it. He had pulled the engineer and fireman of his train, Samuella's, a brakeman—out of the river into which they had plunged with their engine when the spring rains took the bridge. And he swam the river with a broken arm in order to flag the train from the opposite shore. The whole country rang with it, but Sam himself could forget it.

There were meretricious things in him, and this quiet girl he had married saw them as clearly as if he had been his sister; but his gallantry wasn't one of them. Samuella's, ring, fingering, spectacular, it was as real as old Gray Dome's granite peak off there across the plains. Throw things into the sphere of action, untangle the banner of danger, and Sam stopped out, clear and simple as the sky.

He stood with his legs wide apart to bring his face down to the glass and tried on a new green velvet hat—naughty, with the unhealed ends of the severed shoulder muscles still twitching. He was jaundiced because they twitched. He'd risen to meet the challenge of pain. And he'd go on meeting it—if it didn't last too long, he always breast the hills. It was the level stretches that wore him down.

An automobile siren cut through the song of the meadow lark outside. "That's Tom now," said Ella.

Tom Grierson was their neighbor on the hundred and sixty to the north. They had arranged with him to take Sam to the train.

Sam's great arm encircled his wife's shoulder, and she thrilled to the touch of its muscles as clear as oak. The flesh of her ached where the other arm should have gone. They had been so close during those isolated summer weeks of Sam's recovery. The railroad had paid all the doctor's bills, and the neighbors had taken turns in relieving her of the farm work. She had sat for hours at Sam's bedside, sewing.

Little, or in silence, the windows were to the summer, the sweet air quivering with the jubilant songs of the meadow larks, the blue mountains dreaming in the west. A perfect interlude in the midst of life's interludes. She hated to let it end and the old, conflicting influences have away again.

"You won't forget?" she said, taking refuge in the things that could be talked about. "You'll get the mortgage first. And you'll get the train—if you find that you can drive it with your left hand." (Secretly she was sure he could drive it with his teeth if he tried; there weren't many things of this sort he couldn't do.) "And then you'll buy your things on the list—you're sure you've got it?"

"Yep. Inside pocket of my coat over there. And so help me John Henry, I won't say howdy to the mayor, if I meet him on the street, till I've tended to it."

Over his shoulder her eyes fell upon a handkerchief box of speckled pink and pale green stuff that looked like shavings, with a tiny strip of mirror dropped into the lid, like a slice of citron in a cream cookie.

"And nothing else, Sam! Nothing else! Only the things on the list! You promise?"

"Yes, honey. Only the things on the list. I promise."

SHE didn't look at the fragile flowered chiffon parasol of Samuella's that stood over in the corner, or at the little red plush chair with steers' horns for arms, or poor little Jackie's, who never sat in it without pricking himself; or at the big aluminum plaque on the wall, with an edge frilled like a pie and a picture of the capitol building in the center, the middle of it or at the large, darning chrome of a thin-necked, anemic woman in a polonaise and a bustle, with a tall, old-fashioned hat that rode high on her blonde head, and an armful of flowers; or at any of the other presents that Sam had sent from Denver or the big, wide, green, when tipsy confusion had overtaken

him in the midst of poker games that were going against him; but she felt them around her and she knew that he did, too. And she knew that he was remembering how he had stopped the game solemnly, wherever the mood caught him, strode from Flat Peter's pool hall, where the gang foregathered, bought these objects of art, and then he had sent them direct to Ella, and then gone back again and lost the rest of his money with a comparatively easy mind, soled by the thought of the beautiful presents at home.

"But I mean it," he said steadily. "I'm not four-fushy. You try that, drinking and gambling stuff for keeps!"

And she believed him.

"The mortgage, the tractor"—she ticked them off by placing one brown strong finger after another on his chest—"the things on the list, the bank (you'll put in all but just a hundred dollars for running expenses), and then whatever it is the brotherhood's fixed up for you, and the midnight train back to me."

"You said it, partner! And won't we make the little old ranch hum, huh, with both of us on the job all the time! One arm's as good as two any day if it moves fast enough."

"Da-dee! Da-dee!" sang Samuella outside, as high and clear as a bird. "Mr. Grierson's come!"

"It's the first time in all our married life that I haven't been afraid to let you go off without me. But I trust you now the same as I'd trust myself. I didn't know I could be so happy! And so sure!"

He laid his hand gently on her shoulder and looked straight into her eyes. "You go the limit, honey. Be happy as you want to be. Nothing's going to stop you this time!"

As they came out, Samuella, who had kept one eye on the door, broke off her conversation with Grierson away down by the road and came making toward her with the slightly aimless steps of three, stopped in confusion at this sudden upsetting of his plans, gave her a smile of utter confidence and adoration as she passed, and turned himself about and came paddling patiently along behind her.

THE doorway was only a bit of scabbily, hoof-scoured prairie, with a barbed wire fence around it. A few little wild sunflowers flamed here and there, and there were dark green patches of tumbleweed and a brilliant mill, but mostly the choky the wind-blown grass.

The house had never been painted. It had weathered streakily. The streaks ran down from the rusted heads of the nails. There was a small porch on one side, with a hard bar of one corner of it. A chamiso-colored horse with stains on its hips and a brindled cow munched at opposite sides of a generous pile of alfalfa hay with an air of dandyism.

The roof of the barn had fallen in under the weight of last winter's snows.

Sam cast his eye over the dilapidated ranch.

"We'll make the nicest little place out of this old place, and find a hard day's doing." He pointed to a big prairie eagle cruising down the wind high up.

"Hey, Sam!" Tom Grierson called out. "See who's here!" And a man came down from the front seat and came forward to meet them.

"Why, you old son of a gun! It isn't Charlie McKeever! You know Charlie, Ella. Only honest garage keeper in the world!"

They all shook hands.

McKeever, a big, awkward, loosely built fellow of about forty, with a great heartiness of manner.

"Come out to visit my brother Henry. Aiming to come over to see my very best horse, but the horses are all busy. And last night a bunch of the boys down to Denver called me up on the long distance and deputed me to drop over this way and inform you of something."

He revolved his body impressively until he faced Sam. "I'm notifying you officially that the gang's arranging the swiftest feed that the little old town of Denver's ever seen. At Beefsteak Larry's to-night at 6:30. In honor of Sam Pavitt, hero!"

"Well, what do you know about that?" In honor of Mr. Swell stuff, ain't it, Eli? His black eyes shone.

His gregarious, admiration-loving spirit preened in them as openly as a pretty woman before her mirror in a bright room.

"And I can still get back on schedule time. Train don't leave till after midnight."

"You ain't aiming to come back tonight?"

"I ain't aiming to, old son, I'm coming." Sam said with his old familiar grin and a tone of new decisiveness. "Me and Ella and the kids are breakfasting together to-morrow at 7:30."

Climbing into the front seat beside Grierson, "Get in behind me, Satan!" he said to his friend. "And don't open your head about me staying over. It's not that I'm not itching to do it, but I'm cutting out all that old stuff now and starting over."

He turned about in the seat and looked into McKeever's eyes. "Sober, Sam. I'm not playing cards. Or any other game."

Charlie McKeever leaned forward earnestly and included both Sam and Ella in his glance. "Sure," he said, honestly. "And you'd ought to have done it a long time ago. You're not the kind that can't take a drink. I've always told you so. But this is not that sort of a jamboree. All the old gang's going to be there, but that's not what they're coming for. It's—it's—well, to do him honor, Mrs. Pavitt, that's all. And I'm kind of afraid they'll be sore if Sam's got to leave 'em just as things are getting warmed up. Why, Burns and Taylor are coming down from Cripple! And Jim Kite from Alamogosa! And old Harry Law, that hasn't left his Leghorn street boarding house in years, going to be there in his wheel chair!"

"Gee!" said Sam, impressed and touched. "It's a darned good old bunch, I'll tell the world!"

CERTAINLY Ella remembered—they had been darned good to him. There was one of those old-fashioned, when tipsy confusion had overtaken

have done anything he could for Sam Pavitt. Something loosened inside her.

"You stay over if you want to. You can attend to all your other business first," she said, with a smile of understanding.

And almost immediately she wished she hadn't. A look that frightened her danced like an imp in Sam's eyes.

"Gosh! But I'd like to! To think of them fixing up all that just for me!"

Tentatively his eyes probed hers; found her fear, and withdrew hastily.

"No sircie!" He closed the subject incisively. "We'll have the humdriest time ever was up till midnight, and then I'm coming home! Sorry, Charlie, but I've got to keep my engagement with my girl. First I've made since I got out of bed, and I got to keep it."

Grierson let in the clutch, and they left in a swirl of prairie dust, with Sam leaning out of the car and calling back: "Seven-thirty, Eli! I'll be along with Old Man Gile!" Old Man Gile brought the mail.

The children, packed back to the windmill, sturdy and competent, Ella walked with strong, solid steps to the headgate in the irrigating ditch, thinking of the imp that had danced in Sam's eyes.

She had forgotten that look for a time. She was ill. But she knew it bitterly well. It came into the eyes of Sam and Samuella when things were about to happen.

It was so vital and persuasive and irresponsible that it frightened her. Though she had never heard of Pan, she felt his influence and feared it, as all wives and mothers do. She remembered a time when she had caught Samuella with Jackie's kitten in a cigar box, bent on sending off for a voyage in the irrigating ditch—which was four feet wide and running swift and deep with a heavy current of muddy water—and the imp danced in her eyes. "What are promises," it seemed to say, "or wives, or kittens, or anything else, before the necessities of this imperious joy of life!" She felt that she wouldn't have been able to rescue the kitten if she hadn't been bigger than Samuella.

And suddenly she was afraid of what he was going to do in Denver. She was afraid of what he would do with him.

She looked over at the chamiso-colored horse, out of a half impulse to hitch up and follow. But she knew she couldn't treat him like that. He'd never forgive her. No, she had to let him see his own life to live; she couldn't live it for him.

Standing there leaning on her long-handled shovel, she looked off across the prairie and thought about it, and observed idly Tunk Pearce setting forth in his car, apparently out of a little cave in the horizon.

With a sigh she let her mind slip from Sam to Tunk Pearce. He'd be going to Denver. He went to this time every morning. Why, she had been drinking. She mended the children's clothes as she waited. She had taken off the strand of pink beads. But she had forgotten the evening primrose in her hair, a dish of Russell's, and she had left the skirt of his coat. The dye in his hat had run and made a deep green stain on one of his temples. His face was ghastly pale and haggard and sunken and twinkling with pain, and he shook all over with the cold. The medal on his coat gleamed in the lamplight.

He stood in the doorway as if he didn't know whether to come in or not; looked in at her like a wounded dog. His eyes sought hers timidly, and yet with avidity, and as soon as they had found them looked away.

"The money's gone," he said humbly. The words seemed to be jerked out of his shaking body. "I got lost. I lost it—I'm not fit to come in."

The chair creaked forward a little.

It's not his health; it's—it's this dinner tonight. The railroad is paying him the money for his arm to-day. Five thousand dollars. He's promised me to put it in the bank soon's he gets it. It's all we've got, or ever will get. He's promised not to drink and not to play cards to-night, whatever happens. But I—I can't help being afraid! He don't mean anybody any harm, but—you know Sam! If anything starts him—if he thinks the boys are getting to play cards, you're going there, too—Will you—if he starts to play, won't you please stop him if—if you can? There's such a lot depending on it!"

Tunk Pearce looked at her gravely. His jaws worked in time with the wheezing engine of his car. With every chew his tight-fitting hat went solemnly up and down. His face was as expressionless as a house with the shutters closed. Nature and his option had combined to hide his sharp little brown eyes. They lurked about behind heavy puffy lids and thick-lensed glasses. But suddenly they looked straight at her, and she felt that their expression was one of comprehension and friendliness.

"I'll keep an eye on him, Mrs. Pavitt," he said kindly. "Then, after a thoughtful moment: 'I'll keep an eye on him'; and was gone."

ELLA whistled the next morning as she stirred the waffle batter and tried a drop on the iron to see if it was hot enough. She had been up since 5 o'clock, had fed the horse and the cow and the chickens; milked, dressed Jackie and helped Samuella with her buttons; set the table for breakfast, and got everything ready to serve the minute Sam arrived.

Her clear, high, boyish whistle filled the kitchen. Her feet touched the floor lightly as she moved happily about. She had put on a white skirt and a thin white blouse with crocheted lace on the ruffle that ran down the front, and a strand of pink beads. And there was a full-blown

hair, that she had pulled before the sun sealed it for the day.

There were fresh sprays of yellow rabbit-brush in a vase on the little white-covered breakfast table, and a mound of chokecherry jelly in a green glass dish. Jackie, self-conscious and important in conspicuously clean rompers, looped like something from a confectionery store. Samuella in a yellow dress and an old blue hair ribbon made a stunning top for the gatepost. She had been there for fifteen minutes already, but she sat on a stool, her legs gripping the post, her back straight, her hair blown backward by the wind, her eager little face turned in the direction from which her daddy would come, as patient as an Indian.

Ella put the last touch to the table and looked at the clock. Seven twenty-seven. Old Man Gile was rarely late. She went to the door and looked out. Her heart seemed to be beating in a bigger place, to have more room to pulse in. She had been ashamed of her fears before Tunk Pearce was out of sight. She felt that she ought to find Pearce and explain. She felt that it was she who had wronged Sam.

The familiar blot of Old Man Gile's horn came down the wind.

"He's coming! He's coming!" Samuella sang out from the top of the post.

Ella's heart gave a tremendous thump. She sat down the big yellow bowl of batter, called "Daddy's coming!" to Jackie, and went out. She ran toward the gate like a girl.

And Fate took her head-on like that, as a hunter takes a wild duck, and let her have its charge full in the face. She stopped so suddenly that she almost fell. The man on the seat with Old Man Gile wasn't Sam. Samuella, staring at him with big, resentful eyes, held the moment for both of them with her high, disappointed voice: "Where's my daddy?"

"Your daddy didn't come this morning, Sammy." Old Man Gile boomed out cheerfully. "But he's sent you a present. Something pretty nice. Morning, Miss Pavitt. Meet Will Reeves. He's coming out of the right, to help with the disk for a spell, gimme a boost with this thing, Will; it's kind of heavy."

He went around to the back of his little car. The man who wasn't Sam followed. Together they unloaded a wooden box. One at each end, they carried it up the walk. It was long and heavy. They had to go slowly. "Phonograph," Old Man Gile said to Ella as they passed her. "One of those big, money ones."

Samuella danced excitedly ahead. But Ella Pavitt felt in behind, following the big wooden box as if it had been a coffin; walking slowly and unseeing, like a mourner.

SHE put the children to bed early that night and watched for Sam about eleven. He came by the evening train the second day, when he had been drinking. She mended the children's clothes as she waited. She had taken off the strand of pink beads. But she had forgotten the evening primrose in her hair, a dish of Russell's, and she had left the skirt of his coat. The dye in his hat had run and made a deep green stain on one of his temples. His face was ghastly pale and haggard and sunken and twinkling with pain, and he shook all over with the cold. The medal on his coat gleamed in the lamplight.

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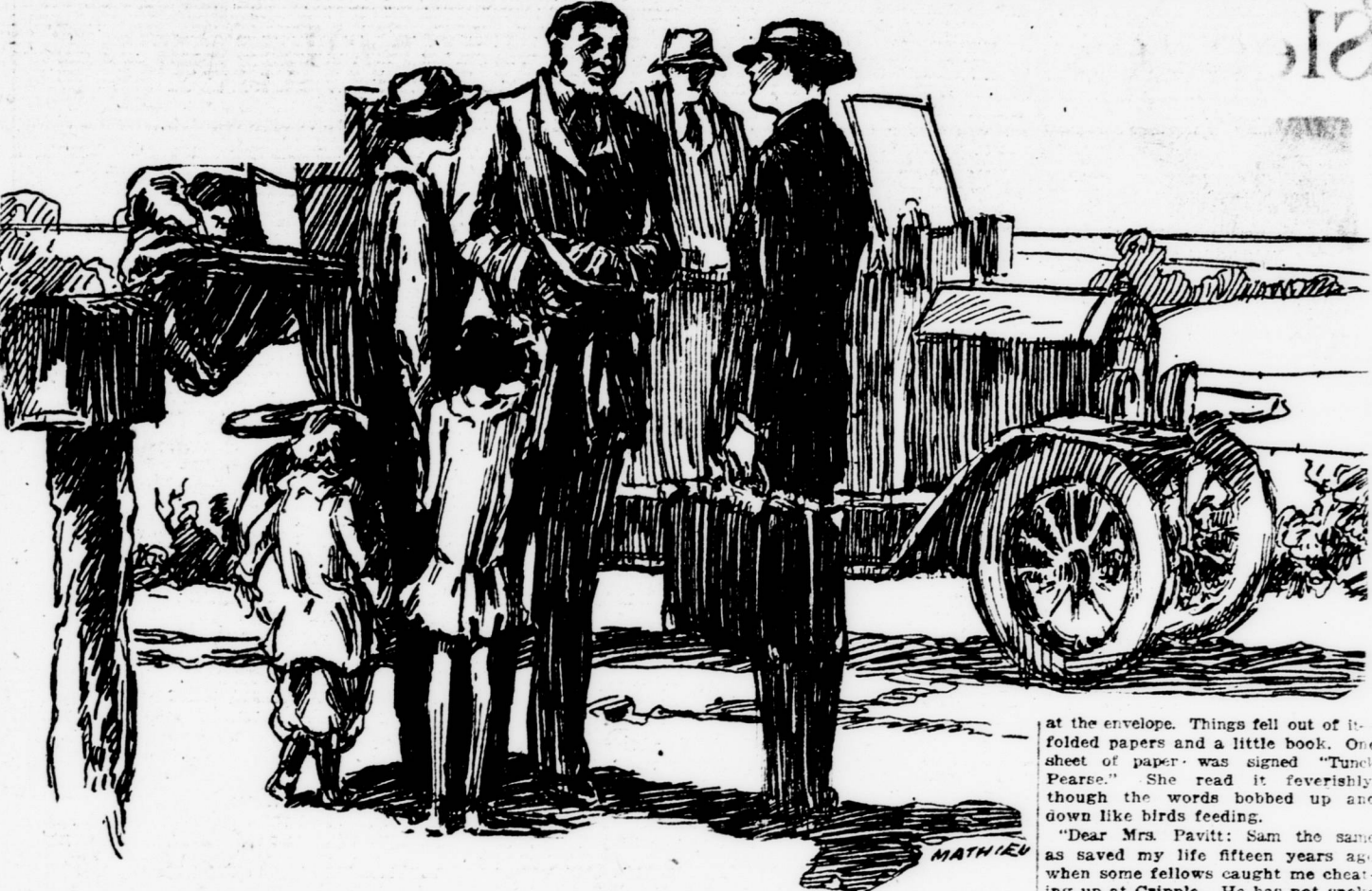
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"YOU AIN'T AIMING TO COME BACK TONIGHT."

"Did you lose it all?" "Yep. Every dollar."

"You didn't tend to the mortgage, or buy the tractor, or the groceries, or the clothes, or anything, before you began to play cards?"

"Good God, no! Don't you suppose I'd tell you if I had?" His teeth were chattering with the cold. "I lost every dollar of it except the price of a—a—the word gagged in his throat."

"I'm a regular low-down, dirty cur! I'm not fit to crawl back to you!"

She looked at him with cold, steady acquiescence.

"And I wouldn't've come," he jerked out. "If it hadn't've seemed yellower not to."

"Yes," she said in a voice like her look. "It would have been yellow."

The look shifted to the medal on his coat, and she let it rest there, but without intention. Her mind was devoid of intentions—blank—

He squirmed beneath her look. It seemed to heat the gleaming medal on his coat and make it burn him. He writhed it off, tearing the cloth he'd have to mend that, and flung it from him.

"I'll never wear the darned thing again!" he chattered, the lips of his weak mouth trembling from cold and misery. But Ella Pavitt knew that he would.

SHE sat on with her quiet hands in her lap and looked at him as impersonally as if he were a tramp who had come in out of the night, or as if she had taken a strong, quick drug that had killed all her feelings.

"For God's sake, say something, Eli! Call me anything you want to, but don't sit there staring at me like that!"

She said, "You ought to have a cup of tea and get out of those clothes and go to bed."

She laid her work aside and got up and filled the heating stove with papers and dry cottonwood twigs and sent a fire roaring up the stack. She went into the kitchen to get the kettle. Through the open door she saw him, drawn near to the warmth almost furtively and stretch out his hand. His face was white and drawn with pain and misery. As she came back into the room he sobbed almost without knowing it. The sound of it smashed the invisible wall that had stood between them and freed her from the trance that had held her. Freed her so that she could suffer too! That was Sam Pavitt there—her boy and her husband! Fate might tear each of them to pieces with the knife blade of the other, but it couldn't separate them.

With an inarticulate cry she thrust the kettle on the stove and gathered him into her arms, wet and dripping as he was, and covered his cold face with kisses and strained him to her and said to him passionately over and over again the silly, babyish things that all the human race uses when its tenderness transcends its words. And Sam Pavitt shut his eyes on his misery and his degradation and clung to her and sobbed like a child.

When she had got him into bed she sat on the edge of it and held his hand and comforted him by letting him talk. But she put the light out, so that he couldn't see her eyes. They were black and shrunken and frightened.

She took her clothes and walked warily into the sitting room to dress. She was dressing warily when the sun found Sam's medal where it lay on the floor and lit it to a gleaming light. She stood still for a long time and stared at it. Slowly it lit up the dark places of her soul. Sam Pavitt had found his life in the boiling river on the chance—every one who knew about it agreed that it was a slight one—on the chance that he could save his friends pinned in the engine cab. And then, for once, he had been wise enough to turn away from the whisky and the cards he'd have turned away from the boiling river—all the other men did—and his friends in the engine cab would have drowned and the whole great hurtling passenger train from the east would have piled itself in on top of them—if Sam had been wise! It was the fools sometimes, the gallant, unquenchable fools who couldn't look ahead, who saved everything!

She picked up Sam's medal and kissed it and laid it gently on the table. He was hers, not as he might have been, but as he was, and she'd see him through.

She finished dressing and went into the kitchen and caught up the milk pail to go out and milk the cow. She saw something sticking under the kitchen door, as if it had been thrust in from outside. It was a long white envelope. She picked it up. It was

addressed to Mrs. Samuel Pavitt, in a hand she didn't know.

She looked swiftly around to see where it could have come from. Outside, through the window, a moving object caught her eye. She pulled the back door open quickly. A man was walking rapidly toward the road. He got quickly into a diminutive automobile and drove away.

She had no conscious thoughts at all. She sank into a chair and tore

at the envelope. Things fell out of it: folded papers and a little book. One sheet of paper was signed "Tunk Pearce." She read it feverishly, though the words bobbed up and down like birds feeding.

"Dear Mrs. Pavitt: Sam the same as saved my life fifteen years ago when some fellows caught me cheating up at Cripple. He has not spoke about it because he was willing to give me another chance. He is the whitest man in this county, but no good at cards. I won his money to keep somebody else from getting it. I bought the mortgage on his land. Here it is, and here is your bank book. I put the balance of the money in a bank in your name. Keep it that way."

"TUNK PEARCE!"

"P. S.—It will kind of please Sam to know that I cheated when I won the money."

(Copyright, 1924.)

## Men's Headwear in Paris Sign of Good Times Coming

PARIS, April 15.

HERE is something new in Paris hats—for men, of course.

Women's hats are always new and novelties. And the hats of Paris men are a sign of good times coming.

The war literally knocked men's headgear into a cocked hat. It is only little by little that the choice of hats by well-dressed Paris men has got back into the old careful genteel ways.

Paris was never as strict about hats as London was. In the muggy heat of July and August, London clerks had to come to business in high hats and black long-tailed coats till a very few years ago. It was the unwritten law, sacred and solemn, just like the hot wig which English judges had to wear when administering justice.

At last an Irishman became Lord Chief Justice Russell of Killowen and on an unusually hot day he took off the wig in full court, but he kept it on the bench. In Paris, war knocked off the high hat from all men's heads.

It was only for a time. Mussolini wears the "tubo," as Latins call the "stovepipe," and in Paris as well as in Rome it is again the one hat "à la cérémonie." In its most curious form, however, we may never see it again—for times have changed and we change with them.

When I began writing these letters thirty years ago the front rows of orchestra chairs at the Paris opera and in the chief theaters were reserved for men—but they had to appear in full evening dress. Each one ambled in with his high hat on his head till he found his seat. Then he shut it to deliberately—for it was the "claque" or high hat with springs to flatten it. The swells came in one by one, and the telescoping of their hats made some noise.

It was different at the intermission, when an instantaneous social function began. The front seats were reserved for these men with "opera hats" in order that they might salute while standing in their places their society lady friends—and such ladies sat in the circling sweep of balcony or dress circle or boxes. Therefore, the moment the curtain went down—bang! went the hats to their full height and the men jumped up, clapping them on their heads. Then the men turned to scrutinize every part of the beauty parade, each lifting his hat to ladies' eyes that smiled recognition.

You could never carry off a social ceremony like that with a round hat or even with a soft hat—but somehow the old hat with springs remains forgotten. So is the proud recognition of friends across a fashionable assembly. Perhaps society in Paris is now too varied for that sort of thing.

Those soft, the ladies long ago pushed into the very first row of orchestra chairs, which suppressed any hat ceremonies of their male escorts.

The high silk hat by day and by night has come back at last. It has triumphed only in the last months. Still, Britishers might stick to it, but only one thing could make ease-loving Frenchmen undergo it after the freedom of war. It is their art instinct. For the well-dressed man is as much a work of art as the woman of fashion is.

What about the headpieces of men in public authority?